

The responsive public: How EU decisions shape public opinion on salient policies*

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Abstract

This study argues that the EU's adoption of a policy increases popular support for that policy. Elite cue theory implies that this effect only materializes among Europeans who trust the Union. Moreover, EU member states' unanimous policy support conveys a stronger cue than the Union's policy endorsement despite vocal dissent. The argument is tested through original survey experiments and the quasi-experimental analysis of a survey that was fielded while the European Council endorsed a salient policy proposal. Support of the policy surged immediately after this decision – but only among Europeans who trust the Union. Experiments in original national surveys confirm that citizens who trust the EU respond to signals from Brussels. Unanimity in the Council of the EU augments the impact of these cues.

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Do European Union (EU) decisions affect public opinion about electorally salient policies? Recent studies show that the Union's policy choices have become politicized (Hagemann, Hobolt and Wratil, 2017). Eager to avoid being punished by voters for taking unpopular decisions, European governments signal responsiveness to domestic electorates during negotiations in Brussels (Schneider, 2019). In contrast to the existing literature, this paper argues that EU decisions do not merely respond to public opinion. Instead, they also shape how European publics think about electorally salient policies. Specifically, the adoption of a policy by the EU increases popular support for that policy, but only among those Europeans who trust the Union. Policy decisions by a united Union have a bigger impact on public opinion than those taken by a divided one.

Public opinion scholarship indicates that most Europeans tend to be rationally ignorant about European integration and form their political attitudes based on cues from trusted elites (de Vries and Edwards, 2009; Gabel and Scheve, 2007*b*). Empirical tests of elite cue theory focus on political parties' communications about the EU, and they conclude that party elites have a bigger impact on partisans' attitudes when they are united rather than divided, because divided elites muddle a group's message (Ray, 2003; Franklin, Marsh and McLaren, 1994). We know much less about the effect of cues conveyed by another set of elites whose decisions on electorally salient issues are widely reported in the European mass media: the Council of the EU and the European Council. I argue that the approval of an electorally salient policy by the Union's main legislative body or its supreme agenda-setter increases public support for that policy. Elite cue theory leads me to expect that this effect only materializes among members of the public who view the Council as a trustworthy body. Moreover, the adoption of a policy by a unanimous Council of the EU signals unity among European government elites while the Council's endorsement of the same policy despite vocal dissent indicates that divisions among member states, and the latter should trigger a smaller rally in support of the policy than the former.

A two-pronged empirical strategy tests this argument. It combines original survey exper-

iments with the quasi-experimental analysis of Eurobarometer survey data. Large nationally representative samples in Austria and Germany took the experiments, which describe scenarios involving two salient policies: EU Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee redistribution between member states. Respondents were randomly assigned to different cues about policy endorsement or disapproval by a united or divided Council of the EU and asked to express their own opinion about these policies. Quasi-experimental analyses of 2020 Eurobarometer survey data complement these experiments. They leverage the fact that the European Council took a key decision on Coronavirus economic recovery aid while the survey was in the field. Whether a given Eurobarometer respondent was interviewed just before or soon after this decision was exogenously determined. Therefore, I can compare the survey responses obtained before this event to those gathered afterward to estimate the decision's impact on public attitudes toward pandemic-era economic aid.

The quasi-experiment and the survey experiments indicate that European publics respond to signals from Brussels. Cues about EU endorsement of fiscal transfers to member states hit hardest by the pandemic and of refugee redistribution from Europe's South to its North increased popular support of these policies by two to seven percentage points. As expected, this average effect was driven by the subset of respondents who view EU elites as trustworthy; their response to cues was more than twice as strong as it was in the full sample. Unanimous decisions tended to trigger an even larger public opinion rally than policy choices over which the Council was divided.

This study makes several contributions to the literature on European integration. First, it presents the argument that European publics take cues from the EU when they form opinions about salient policies. Thus, it extends elite cue theory and sheds new light on signals conveyed by European elites other than political parties. Second, the additional signaling effect of unanimity in the Council of the EU gives European governments an incentive to pursue consensus on salient policies to rally publics in support of their decisions. In turn, this added value of consensus may help us understand why unanimous Council decisions

are ubiquitous even in issue areas where the formal rules prescribe qualified majority voting. Third, this study leverages survey experiments and a quasi-experiment to avoid bias induced by endogeneity (e.g., of unanimity among EU elites and public opinion). This research design combines the strong internal validity of design-based causal inference with the external validity of pan-European surveys to attain more solid evidence on public attitudes toward European integration.

The findings also enhance our understanding of public opinion about international redistribution. To date, the literature has not examined how international elite cues affect mass attitudes about redistribution between countries.¹ The effect of elite cues varies by issue area (Dragojlovic, 2013), and therefore we cannot extrapolate from previously studied topics to international redistribution. This study shows that citizens respond to signals from foreign elites when they form their opinions about international redistribution.

1 How public opinion affects European integration

The ‘permissive consensus’ that allowed European governments to pursue regional integration without taking into account public opinion (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970) has given way to a ‘constraining dissensus’ (Hooghe and Marks, 2009) marked by close referenda and divisive partisan debates on European cooperation. Public opinion in member states shapes contemporary European integration (de Vries, 2018; Hobolt, 2009) and aggregate EU policy outputs respond to public attitudes (Bølstad, 2015; Toshkov, 2011). Specific EU policies also enter the arena of political contestation (Schneider, 2019). The politicization of EU decisions explains why policymakers are eager to signal responsiveness to public opinion. Thus, the EU Commission accommodates popular concerns (Bazzan and Migliorati, 2020). In the Council of the EU, public opinion affects member states’ negotiation positions (Wrátil, 2018) and leads them to abstain or vote against unpopular legislative proposals (Hobolt and Wrátil, 2020; Hagemann, Hobolt and Wrátil, 2017; Bailer, Mattila and Schneider, 2015).

¹Greenhill (2020)’s study of a U.S.-based convenience sample is a notable exception.

What motivates governments to respond to domestic public opinion when they adopt legislation in the Council of the EU? Doing so improves their chance of remaining in office because EU issues increasingly impact constituents' vote choice. Thus, politicians have higher approval ratings when they signal responsiveness to voters' concerns during negotiations in Brussels (Schneider, 2019). Attitudes toward European integration influence vote choice in parliamentary elections (de Vries and Hobolt, 2012; de Vries, 2007; Tillman, 2004) and in recent European Parliament elections (Hobolt, 2015; de Vries et al., 2011). In short, the increasing electoral salience of EU issues incentivizes politicians to pay close attention to public opinion when they participate in the Union's policymaking.

2 Explanations of public attitudes on issues on the EU's agenda

What determines public opinion on European integration and EU policies? The extant literature presents three explanations of EU attitudes: material cost-benefit calculations, identity considerations, and cue-taking.² According to economic self-interest accounts, Europeans with higher educational attainment and marketable occupational skills are better able to compete in an integrated labor market and are thus more supportive of international economic integration (Hobolt, 2014; Gabel, 1998). Affluent Europeans benefit from EU policies that reduce inflation, public sector spending, and restrictions on open financial markets, and they also tend to favor European integration (Gabel and Palmer, 1995). Material self-interest also leads low-income voters to oppose EU fiscal transfers when they fear losing welfare benefits (Kleider and Stoeckel, 2019).

Recent studies challenge material self-interest explanations by pointing to cultural identity and political values as predictors of EU support. Persons who conceive of national identities as inclusive of other territorial identities are more likely to support European integration than those who hold exclusive national identities (Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Carey,

²EU integration and policies entail economic *and* identity considerations (Margalit, 2012; Hooghe and Marks, 2004), and the relative importance of these factors varies between countries, individuals, and issues (Pannico, 2017; Guerra and Serricchio, 2015).

2002). Negative attitudes toward the EU are correlated with hostility to immigration and to other cultures (Kuhn and Stoeckel, 2014; de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005; McLaren, 2002). In turn, exclusive national identities and anti-immigration sentiments shape public opinion on refugee redistribution between EU member states (Gerhards et al., 2020), as do notions of fairness (Bansak, Hainmueller and Hangartner, 2017). Cosmopolitan values (Kuhn, Solaz and van Elsas, 2018; Bechtel, Hainmueller and Margalit, 2014), altruism and leftist ideology (Daniele and Geys, 2015), as well as cultural openness (Kleider and Stoeckel, 2019) help explain popular support of EU fiscal transfers in rich member states.

A third strand of the literature focuses on citizens' reliance on heuristics in the process of opinion formation. First, Europeans use national governance as a benchmark when they evaluate European integration and EU policies. While Armingeon and Ceka (2014) and Hobolt (2012) conclude that citizens' confidence in national institutions has positive spillover effects on their assessment of the EU, Kumlin (2011), Rohrschneider (2002), and Sánchez-Cuenca (2000) find that citizens who are satisfied with domestic governance are more likely to view the EU as flawed than those who experience political dysfunction in their home country. Second, citizens' EU attitudes are influenced by cues from their preferred political party and news source. Specifically, party elite cues inform partisans' views on European integration (Steenbergen, Edwards and de Vries, 2007; Gabel and Scheve, 2007*a*; Ray, 2003) and on specific EU policies, such as bailouts (Stoeckel and Kuhn, 2018), energy policy (Pannico, 2020), fiscal austerity, and trade agreements (Pannico, 2017). Party cues also influence party sympathizers' vote choice in EU referenda (Hobolt, 2007; Franklin, Marsh and McLaren, 1994). Elite cues from news media sources also shape EU attitudes (Azrout, Spanje and de Vreese, 2012; Maier and Rittberger, 2008).

3 Theory

Elite cue theory posits that most members of the public form their opinion about foreign affairs on the basis of signals conveyed by knowledgeable and trusted elites (Zaller, 1992).

Elites are “individuals - often but not exclusively government officials - who by role, experience, or expertise are in a position to comment on matters of public concern and are seen to be in that position by those who would contribute to public understanding ...” (Brody, 1991, 65). The U.S. public takes political cues from various domestic elites, including government officials, party leaders, generals, journalists, experts, and even celebrities (e.g., Golby, Feaver and Dropp, 2018; Guisinger and Saunders, 2017; Gelpi, 2010; Pease and Brewer, 2008; Berinsky, 2007). Americans also rely on cues from foreign elites when forming their attitudes on international affairs (Hayes and Guardino, 2011; Thompson, 2009). International organizations in particular convey signals about elite opinion abroad and shape the U.S public’s views on foreign policy (Greenhill, 2020; Bearce and Cook, 2018; Grieco et al., 2011; Chapman and Reiter, 2004). International organizations and other foreign elites also influence public opinion in China (Fang and Sun, 2019), Japan (Ikeda and Tago, 2014), and the UK (Johns and Davies, 2014).

What do these findings about international elite cues tell us about the formation of EU attitudes by European publics? Existing scholarship cannot answer this question. The large literature on public opinion about European integration and EU policies has examined elite cues conveyed by domestic parties and mass media, but it has neglected signals from other elite sources (see Hobolt and De Vries, 2016 for a literature review).³ Walter (2020) concludes that a cue from the President of the EU Commission did not affect British voters’ expectations about Brexit and does not examine whether this signal changed the public’s policy preferences. Walter et al. (2018) convincingly show that near-simultaneous decisions by the European Central Bank and the Greek government on banking jointly influenced Greek public attitudes about a different policy (EU bailout) but cannot isolate the effect of each event. Other studies argue that EU decisions - and member states’ votes in the Council of the EU - affect government approval ratings (Schneider, 2019) and that Council members signal responsiveness to their domestic publics (Hobolt and Wrátil, 2020; Hagemann, Hobolt

³In contrast, it has analyzed the impact of signals from mass publics: the Brexit vote affected other publics’ attitudes toward their countries’ departure from the Union (Walter, 2020; de Vries, 2017).

and Wratil, 2017; Bailer, Mattila and Schneider, 2015). At the same time, this literature leaves open the question whether and how EU decisions on a given policy (e.g., refugee redistribution between EU members) affect public attitudes about that policy.

In contrast to the literature on EU responsiveness, this study argues that EU decisions do not merely respond to mass opinion; instead, EU decisions on salient policies also shape public attitudes about these policies. Most voters are rationally ignorant about international affairs, but limited information does not prevent them from forming reasoned policy preferences (Zaller, 1992; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998). This is because citizens rely on elite cues as substitutes for detailed policy information when they form political attitudes (Steenbergen, Edwards and de Vries, 2007; Gabel and Scheve, 2007*a*; Ray, 2003). If European citizens form their policy preferences (at least partly) in response to signals from trusted elites, they should not only heed the advice of their preferred party and news source but also incorporate cues from other elites. EU institutions are elite bodies that convey cues about the policies they endorse or oppose. The Union is the most advanced international organization in the world in terms of budget, staff size, and depth of cooperation. The Council of the EU is the “single most powerful decision-making body in the EU” (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016, 424), where member states’ government ministers negotiate and adopt legislative proposals and the Union’s budget, coordinate economic and fiscal policies, and handle external affairs. In the European Council, EU members’ heads of state and government meet to define the Union’s overall direction and priorities. Their broad mandates and authority enable the Council of the EU and the European Council to send cues about many salient issues.

Cues from Council of EU and European Council are readily available to European publics primarily through the mass media. Such signals receive relatively intense coverage, because journalists tend to focus on reporting the opinions of authoritative elites who can influence policy outcomes (see news media content analysis below and Baum and Groeling, 2010, 4). The news media extensively covers decisions of international organizations and foreign governments in their coverage of international affairs (Hayes and Guardino, 2010). BBC

news reporting on refugee arrivals in the UK and Southern Europe featured foreign elites more prominently than domestic ones, and the Council of the EU was the most frequently referenced international elite source (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015). European Council summits receive relatively intense television coverage (de Vreese, 2003) and popular news outlet cover important decisions of the Council of the EU (Hagemann, Hobolt and Wratil, 2017). In short, it is increasingly likely that the mass media conveys cues about salient policies from these EU bodies to European citizens. I expect that the endorsement of a policy by the Council of the EU or the European Council will systematically affect support of the policy among members of the public (*hypothesis 1*).

The fact that mass media coverage is the primary transmission channel for these signals implies a scope condition for my argument: Cues from Brussels should only sway public attitudes when the mass media finds EU decisions newsworthy. Electorally salient decisions (e.g., on the distribution of refugees or new fiscal transfers between member states) satisfy this scope condition. Inconsequential decisions on arcane issues are unlikely to be covered by the mass media, and therefore the public will not take into account EU policy choices when it forms attitudes on non-salient topics.

Elite cue theory indicates that members of the public take cues from trusted elites (Zaller, 1992). Thus, cues from political parties primarily affect their partisans' EU attitudes (Stoeckel and Kuhn, 2018; Maier, Adam and Maier, 2017), and cues from parties that lack popular trust have little mobilizing force (Guerra and McLaren, 2016; Klingemann et al., 2007). Analogously, I expect that cues from Brussels only impact the attitudes of citizens who place at least a modicum of trust in EU elites. These citizens rely on a policy's approval by trusted EU elites as a cognitive shortcut (heuristic) to form their own policy attitude without having to work through the details of the issue. In contrast, Europeans that do not trust EU elites should not take cues from them. In 2019, 40 and 38 percent of Eurobarometer respondents expressed trust in the European Council and the Council of the EU, respectively, whereas 36 and 35 percent voiced distrust (European Commission, 2019). I expect that the

approval of a policy by the Council of the EU or the European Council increases support of the policy among citizens who trust these institutions and that it does not affect the policy attitudes of those who distrust them (*hypothesis 2*).

This argument about the effect of trust is different from (but compatible with) previous scholarship on trust in the EU. While Armingeon and Ceka (2014) and Kuhn and Stoeckel (2014) show that trust in the EU increases support of European integration and of specific EU policies (bailouts), this study argues that trust in EU institutions increases the Union's ability to shape public support of policies by endorsing or opposing them.

When citizens form policy attitudes, they consider whether elites agree or disagree about the policy: “when elites uphold a clear picture of what should be done, the public tends to see events from that point of view” (Zaller, 1992, 9). In contrast, vocal dissent by some elites from a majority view confronts the public with a second signal that contradicts the majority's cue and thereby reduces its heuristic value. For instance, a scholarly consensus shapes the public's policy preferences, but dissent by a small minority of experts undermines the scientific community's impact on mass opinion (Maliniak, Parajon and Powers, 2021; Aklin and Urpelainen, 2014). Similarly, citizens are more likely to agree with unanimous court decisions than with those issued with dissenting opinions (Zink, Spriggs and Scott, 2009). Pro-EU consensus across political parties is associated with higher public support for European integration than disagreements between parties (Guerra and McLaren, 2016; Stoeckel, 2013), and elite conflict transformed publics' ‘permissive consensus’ into ‘constraining dissent’ on European integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2005, 425-6). If the leaders of the same party are divided, they convey contradictory cues to the public, muddy the party's message, and weaken its influence on partisans' views (Steenbergen, Edwards and de Vries, 2007; Ray, 2003; Franklin, Marsh and McLaren, 1994). Similarly, I expect that a united Council of the EU conveys a fundamentally different signal to the public than a divided Council. Unanimous Council approval of a policy signals consensus among EU member states in favor of the policy. This cue should rally public opinion in support of that policy. In contrast, the

policy’s endorsement by a divided Council signals that governments are split over the policy, which complicates citizens’ reliance on this cue as a cognitive shortcut. EU elite divisions therefore reduce the EU elite cue’s impact on mass opinion. I expect that the unanimous approval of a policy by the Council of the EU causes a larger increase in public support of that policy than the endorsement of the same policy despite vocal dissent by some Council members (*hypothesis 3*).

4 Survey experiments

4.1 *Research design*

To test the argument, I rely on a two-pronged empirical strategy that combines a quasi-experiment (see Part 5 below) and survey experiments embedded in two large original surveys. This research design accounts for the endogeneity between public opinion and signals from Brussels: The adoption of a proposal in the Council of the EU is more likely - and without dissenting votes - when Council members expect popular support for that legislation (Schneider, 2019; Hagemann, Hobolt and Wratil, 2017). Therefore, correlational analyses of Council decisions and survey data risk overestimating the impact of cues from Brussels on public attitudes. Survey experiments avoid this bias by randomly assigning respondents to one of multiple cues from the Council of the EU to causally identify the effect of these signals.

Two surveys confronted respondents with experimental vignettes about fiscal transfers between EU member states and the Union’s response to the influx of refugees across the Mediterranean. These issues were selected to satisfy the scope condition of the argument, which only applies to electorally salient issues. In both countries where the surveys were conducted (Austria and Germany), the public views immigration and the state of EU members’ finances as two of the three most pressing issues facing the Union (European Commission, 2019). In these countries, immigration and fiscal transfers to Southern Europe are electorally salient and have been identified as key motivations for support of far-right parties (Hobolt,

2015), which politicize EU actions on both issues.

I test the argument with survey experiments on two different topics and in two countries to ensure that the findings generalize beyond a specific vignette and a single idiosyncratic national context. Austria and Germany represent good test cases for several reasons. While both are large net contributors to the EU budget and accommodate more refugees per capita than most other EU member states, stark differences exist between their governments' policy positions: While German governments have consistently favored the relocation of refugees from Greece and Italy to other EU members, Austria's governments have voiced opposition to that policy. Moreover, the German government was a key proponent of the 2020 Coronavirus economic recovery fund while Austria joined the fiscally conservative 'Frugal Four' countries that initially rejected this initiative and remained skeptical of it. If I find that cues from the Council of the EU have an impact in both countries, I can rule out that their effect hinges on prior real-world exposure to congruent (or incongruent) cues from national government elites. Similar results in both countries thus increase my confidence that findings may generalize to other rich EU member states with pro-EU or more Euroskeptic governments.

Both survey experiments confronted respondents with hypothetical scenarios about a policy proposal and the EU Council's decision to adopt or reject it. The experiments were administered in random order to avoid context effects. The recovery fund experiment presented the following scenario:⁴

“The Coronavirus inflicted severe damage to the economy. Unemployment increased strongly, especially in Southern Europe. An economic crisis in Southern Europe would also hurt [Austria/Germany]. Germany and France want the European Union to take out loans in the amount of 500 billion Euro and to give the money to those member states that were hit the hardest by the crisis.”

The refugee relocation experiment confronted respondents with this situation:

⁴The Austrian and German texts are collapsed here for convenience.

“Over the course of the past few months, more than 70,000 persons crossed the Mediterranean and applied for asylum in Greece, Italy, and Spain. Many of these refugees want to move to [Austria/Germany]. Greece, Italy, and Spain want the other members of the European Union to help with the influx of refugees. Germany proposed to relocate 40,000 of these refugees to other members of the European Union; [800/11,000] of them would be relocated to [Austria/Germany].”

The wording of the vignettes mirrors news coverage of refugee and economic policy in widely read newspapers in these countries (e.g., Bild, Kronenzeitung). The description of Coronavirus economic recovery aid was based on the proposal France and Germany made in May 2020, which was endorsed by the Council of the EU (after the surveys) in October, and formally adopted in February 2021. The number of refugees who crossed the Mediterranean was based on data on asylum applications in Greece, Italy, and Spain during the six months before the survey (European Union, 2020*a*). Austrian and German resettlement quotas were modeled after the 2015-7 refugee relocation plan (Trimborn, 2015).

Immediately after reading the vignette of either experiment, respondents were asked to express their own opinion about the proposed policies: “Would you favor or oppose the European Union taking out loans in the amount of 500 billion Euro and giving the money to those member states that were hit the hardest by the crisis?” and “Would you favor or oppose relocating 40,000 refugees to other members of the European Union and relocating [800/11,000] of them to [Austria/Germany]?” Respondents could choose between five options (strongly favor, somewhat favor, neither favor nor oppose, somewhat oppose, strongly oppose) rescaled from 0 (oppose) to 1 (favor).

Each experiment manipulated respondents’ perception of the Council of the EU’s position on the proposal. Some respondents were randomly assigned to a sentence at the end of the vignette displayed above that informed them that the Council of the EU unanimously accepted the proposal. Others learned that the Council accepted it despite dissenting votes of a few small states. Two additional treatment conditions conveyed the information that

the Council opposed the policy either due to vetoes cast by a few EU members or broad opposition among EU member states. The Online Appendix presents the full wording of each treatment condition.

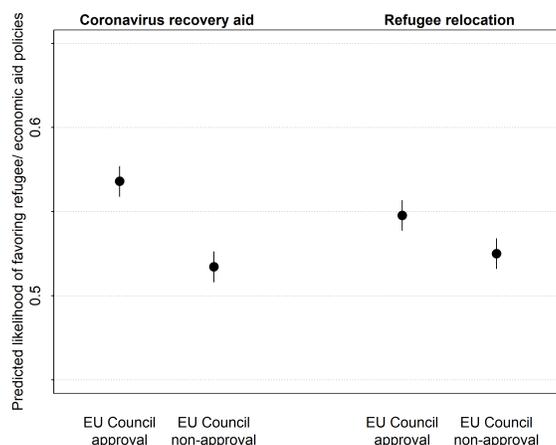
Pretreatment attitudes towards the Council of the EU were assessed on a five-point scale that captures respondents' answers to questions about their trust in the institution's judgment on economic and fiscal policy or refugee policy, respectively. Randomized treatment assignment makes it unnecessary to add controls to the model for the purpose of causal identification, but the results are robust to including sociodemographic covariates: respondents' age, gender, education, income level, political orientation, and interest in politics and foreign affairs (see Appendix Table A.2 for descriptive statistics). Region (Bundesland) fixed effects are included in all OLS models. Respondents assigned to the unanimous Council approval treatment establish the baseline, and dichotomous treatment variables indicate whether respondents were told that the Council approved the policy despite dissent, that some EU members cast vetoes, or that most countries opposed it.

The surveys were administered in August and September 2020 to samples that were nationally representative of Austrian and German adult populations in terms of age, gender, and region. The sample sizes were 2,556 in Austria and 2,542 in Germany. The survey company Respondi recruited these respondents using an opt-in methodology and administered the experiments online.

4.2 Results

Evidence from both surveys strongly supports the proposition that signals from Brussels affect public attitudes about policies on the Union's agenda. When the Council approves (rather than rejects) a policy proposal, support of that policy increases by 3 to 7 percentage points, on average (see Figure 1). This estimate is based on the comparison of respondents who were assigned to cues of unanimous approval or endorsement despite dissent, on the one hand, and the those who learned that the Council rejected the proposal due to vetoes or

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee resettlement: effect of approval and non-approval of these policies by the Council of the EU



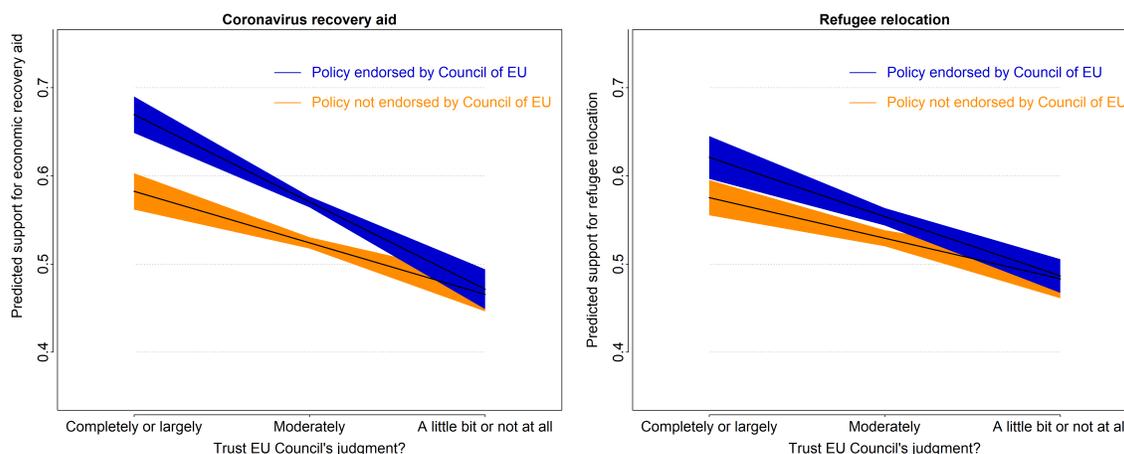
Note: The figure depicts the predicted probabilities of support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee resettlement with 95% confidence intervals in the pooled sample of Austrian and German respondents. They are based on models 10 and 12 in Appendix Table A.6.

broad opposition among member states, on the other. OLS models in Appendix Table A.6 confirm that the average effect of cues from the Council of the EU is statistically significant in both experiments in the pooled sample of Austrian and German respondents.

To test the argument that citizens who trust the Council’s judgment respond more strongly to its signals than others, I include respondents’ pre-treatment levels of trust in the Council as well as its interaction with the Council’s policy approval in the models reported in Appendix Tables A.7-A.8. In those models, the coefficient of Council approval indicates the cue’s impact on respondents in the baseline category, who fully trust this institution. Among these respondents, the signaling effect is more than twice as large as the average in the whole sample. The coefficient of the interaction between Council approval and trust in the institution indicates that low confidence in the Council’s judgment reduces the effect of cues from that body on respondents’ policy views. In both experiments, this interaction is significant in the models of the full sample.

The Council’s endorsement of a policy increases support of that policy by 5-12 percentage points among respondents who place a lot of trust in the judgment of this institution (see

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee resettlement by level of trust in Council of the EU

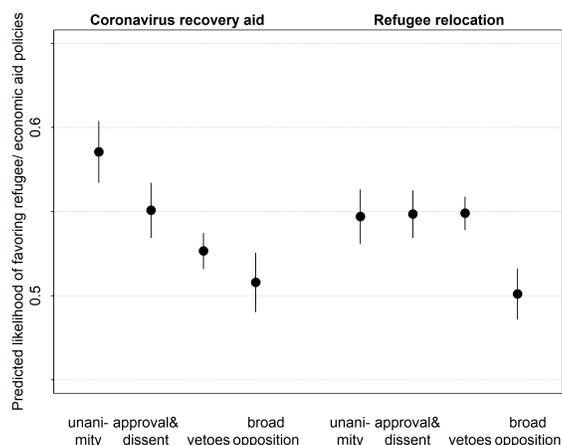


Note: The figure depicts the predicted probabilities (with 95% confidence intervals) of support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee resettlement by level of trust in the judgment of the Council of the EU in the pooled sample of Austrian and German respondents. The predictions are derived from models with the same specifications as models 17-18 in Appendix Table A.8, except that trust was rescaled to a three-point measure.

Figure 2). In contrast, these signals do not affect the attitudes of respondents who lack trust in the Council. Overall, the results corroborate the argument that respondents who view the Council as a trustworthy elite body take cues from it while others do not form their policy opinions based on signals from that body.

Results from the Coronavirus recovery aid experiment support the third hypothesis, which posits that the signaling effect of cues from the Council of the EU depends on whether the institution is united or divided. The unanimous adoption of the proposed policy caused higher popular support of the policy than the endorsement of the same motion despite the dissent of a few EU member states. In the models reported in Appendix Tables A.9-A.10, the coefficient of approval with dissent causally identifies this quantity. It compares the attitudes of respondents who were assigned to the baseline condition (i.e., unanimous Council approval) to the views of respondents who read that the Council endorsed these policies despite dissent. While unanimity in the Council increased public support of economic and fiscal policy, its impact was statistically insignificant in the refugee relocation experiment.

Figure 3: Predicted probabilities of support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee resettlement: effect of unity and divisions in the Council of the EU



Note: The figure shows how public support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee resettlement varies as a function of unity and divisions in the Council of the EU. Predicted probabilities for the pooled sample of Austrian and German respondents are displayed with 95% confidence intervals. These predictions are based on models 23-24 in Appendix Table A.10.

4.3 *Alternative explanations*

Further analyses rule out an alternative explanation of the results based on domestic elites. In the absence of any information about domestic elites in the experimental vignettes, respondents might use the position of the Council of the EU as a rough proxy for the views of national elites. If so, they may respond to cues about the Council of the EU even if they are indifferent about that institution’s policy position. If this alternative explanation is accurate, the signaling effect of cues from the Council of the EU would change in the presence of a second cue about domestic elites’ stance. To test this proposition, half of the respondents were assigned to cues about domestic elites. The domestic and EU elite treatments were independently randomized. In Germany, this second treatment consisted in the information that “most parties in the German Bundestag support this proposal” while Austrians learned that “the majority of the Austrian Nationalrat opposes this proposal.” This information was displayed immediately after the EU elite cue. It reflects the real-world positions of Austrian and German political parties. By cueing majority support and opposition from domestic

political elites, I verify whether the hypothesized effect of cues from Brussels is independent of congruent (or incongruent) signals from national political elites. In both countries and in both experiments, cues about domestic elites did not diminish the effect of EU elite cues (see Appendix Table A.11). Thus, respondents assigned an intrinsic value to cues from Brussels and responded to them even if they also received domestic elite cues.

5 Quasi-experimental analysis of Eurobarometer data

5.1 *Research design*

Quasi-experimental analyses of Eurobarometer survey data show that the theorized effects also materialize in the real world outside the controlled yet artificial environment of survey-based experiments. They leverage the research design opportunity that stems from the endorsement of Coronavirus economic recovery aid by the European Council while a Eurobarometer survey was in the field across Europe. I can estimate the impact of that seminal Council decision on public opinion by comparing the attitudes of respondents who were interviewed just before the Council's decision to the views of interviewees who took the survey soon thereafter. If the argument is right that EU citizens take cues from trusted EU elites who approve salient policies, support for Coronavirus recovery aid should increase in the wake of the European Council's decision - but only among citizens who trust the EU.

On 21 July 2020, the European Council reached political agreement on a Coronavirus economic recovery fund. It delineated the rough contours of the aid package, which was endorsed by the Council of the EU in October and formally adopted in February 2021. (European Union, 2020*b*, 2021). The Council's July 2020 summit laid the groundwork for a historic 70% increase in the EU's budget over the next seven years. The Council met while the Eurobarometer 93.1 survey was in the field from 2 July to 31 August 2020. To assess citizens' willingness to pay for international redistribution, the analyses focus on responses from all countries that are net contributors to the EU budget: Austria, Denmark, Finland,

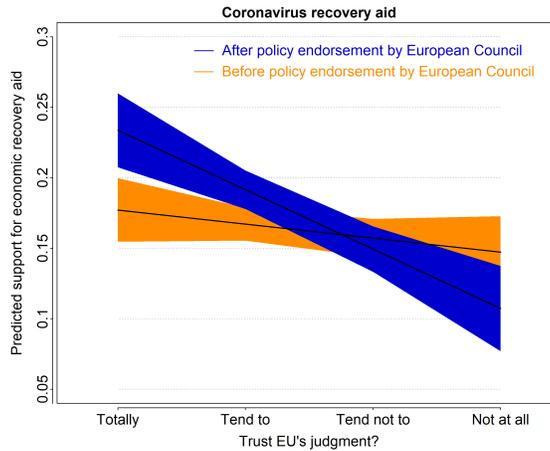
France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and Sweden. In these countries, 5,418 responses were gathered before the conclusion of the Council summit, and 4,220 interviews were conducted afterwards.

The following survey question captures attitudes toward Coronavirus economic recovery aid: “And what should the European Union now prioritize in its response to the Coronavirus outbreak? ... Provide more financial support to the most affected regions in the EU”. Respondents could select zero to three items from a list of 13 options or volunteer a different EU priority. The dependent variable takes a positive value for respondents who chose the financial support option and 0 for others. Trust in the EU’s judgment about Coronavirus recovery policies is measured based on responses to the following question: “Thinking about EU’s response to the Coronavirus outbreak, to what extent do you trust or not the EU to make the right decisions in the future?” The answer options were “totally trust”, “tend to trust”, “tend not to trust”, “do not trust at all” or “don’t know”.

The OLS models include the same standard demographic characteristics as covariates as the models of the survey experiments discussed above: age, gender, education, income, political orientation, as well as interest in politics and in international affairs. Controls are not strictly necessary to causally identify the effect of the Council’s policy endorsement, because the treatment (interview before or after the Council’s decision) was exogenously assigned. However, their addition increases efficiency.

The European Council’s endorsement of Coronavirus economic recovery aid can only influence mass attitudes if mass or social media transmit the cue from Brussels to European publics. News media typically cover European Council summits (de Vreese, 2003) such as the historic one held in July 2020. Television remains the most popular news source in Europe (European Commission, 2019). News media content analyses in Appendix Table A.14 confirm that the most highly rated television news programs extensively covered the Council’s decision on 21 July 2020. Therefore, the most plausible explanation of a change in mass opinion about Coronavirus economic recovery aid after July 21 would be that Europeans

Figure 4: Predicted probabilities of support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid before and after European Council decision by level of trust in EU’s judgment



Note: The figure depicts the predicted probabilities (with 95% confidence intervals) of support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid by level of trust in the EU among Eurobarometer respondents interviewed before and after the European Council reached a political agreement on this policy. They are based on model 30 in Appendix Table A.12.

received - and responded to - the European Council’s cue about this policy. The next subsection analyzes this change in public attitudes.

5.2 Results

The results of the quasi-experimental analyses of Eurobarometer data are consistent with those obtained from the survey experiments. Respondents who were interviewed soon after the European Council reached a political agreement on Coronavirus economic recovery aid (i.e., those who were exposed to cues from EU elites transmitted through media) were significantly more likely to express the view that the EU should prioritize financially supporting hard-hit regions than those who were interviewed just before the Council summit. Support for this proposition increased by 10 percent or 1.5 percentage points (see Model 29 in Appendix Table A.12). This result confirms hypothesis 1.

In line with hypothesis 2, the Council’s endorsement of Coronavirus economic recovery aid did not affect attitudes toward that policy among respondents who lacked trust in the Union’s judgment on pandemic responses. In contrast, citizens who trusted the EU became

more supportive of prioritizing EU financial support to hard-hit areas after the Council’s decision. Overall, 66% of respondents in the sample expressed trust in the EU’s judgment about Covid-19 responses. Among those who trusted the Union completely - i.e., in the baseline group in model 30 in Appendix Table A.12 - average support for prioritizing EU recovery aid surged by 32% (or 6 percentage points) in the wake of the European Council’s endorsement of that policy.

5.3 Covariate balance and placebo test

Causal identification of the effect of the Council’s policy endorsement is based on the assumption that the timing of each interview - just before or after the Council’s decision - was exogenously determined. Survey administration did not influence the date of the Council’s summit, and the order in which the survey was administered was determined long before anyone knew whether and when the Council would approve this policy. Therefore, respondents who fell on either side of this date were not systematically different, in expectation, and covariate balance analyses do not detect major differences in socioeconomic characteristics at the conventional 95% confidence level (see Appendix Table A.13). Overall, covariate balance between the two groups lends support to the identifying assumption that both groups are not systematically different. Differences between EU attitudes of these groups can therefore be ascribed to the cue from the Council that only one of them was exposed to.

A placebo test lends further support to the claim that the Council’s policy endorsement changed public attitudes toward the approved policy. It examines respondents’ opinion about a policy that was not discussed at the European Council summit: free movement between EU countries. As expected, public attitudes toward that policy remained the same after the Council’s meeting (see Appendix Table A.13). This indicates that the change in public attitudes toward economic recovery aid was not part of a broad shift in EU attitudes that temporally coincided with the European Council’s summit; instead, it was caused by the body’s decision on pandemic relief.

6 Conclusion

While the recent literature argues that the EU signals responsiveness to public opinion, this study shows that the Union's policy choices do not merely react to public opinion but also shape it. Survey experiments fielded to large national samples in Austria and Germany and quasi-experimental analyses of an EU decision taken during a Eurobarometer survey indicate that the endorsement of electorally salient policies by the Council of the EU or the European Council increase popular support for these policies - but only among members of the public who trust the Councils' judgment. On average, cues of EU approval of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee relocation increase EU citizens' approval of these policies by 3-7 percentage points.

Trust in EU elites varies greatly between EU member states. Eurobarometer survey data indicates that the share of citizens who tend to trust the Council of the EU ranges from 26% in France to 57% in Romania (European Commission, 2019). The findings from this study imply that the Council finds it more difficult to influence policy attitudes in member states with Eurosceptic publics than in countries where most citizens consider the Council a trustworthy elite actor from which they are willing to take cues.

The study also suggests that signals from Brussels may contribute to the polarization of public attitudes toward European integration. If Europeans who trust EU elites become more supportive of EU-approved policies while other EU citizens do not, then the public's policy attitudes diverge due to dissimilar baseline opinions about the Union. In turn, mass opinion about policies endorsed by the EU may inform popular assessments of the Union's performance legitimacy (Scholte and Tallberg, 2018). Ultimately, diverging views about EU policies can further polarize public perceptions of EU legitimacy. Examining this feedback loop could be a promising avenue for future research.

This study lends qualified support to the notion that a united Council of the EU has a larger signaling effect on public attitudes than a divided one. The impact of unanimity in the Council of the EU on public opinion may help us understand why EU members often

make cumbersome compromises and costly side payments to secure *all* EU member states' approval even in issue areas where they could pass their preferred policy with a qualified majority vote. Complementing other explanations of consensus decision-making in Brussels (Häge, 2013; Novak, 2013), this study points to an additional incentive to pursue consensus in the Council on highly salient policies: to influence EU citizens' policy attitudes by signaling unity (instead of divisions) among EU governments.

Future research could examine how signals conveyed by policy decisions of the Council of the EU affect the attitudes and behavior of other audiences (in addition to domestic publics). Studies argue that individual Council members cast negative votes or abstain to send signals to domestic legislators and to special interest groups (Hagemann, Bailer and Herzog, 2019; Bailer, Mattila and Schneider, 2015). Plausibly, these audiences do not just react to their own government's voting behavior, but also pay attention to signals of unity and divisions in the Council of the EU. In addition, consensus and disunity among member states also convey signals to government elites outside the Union and to financial markets. For instance, a credit rating agency recently concluded that weakening cohesion among EU member states over Covid-19 economic recovery aid might lower Europe's credit ratings (Khan and Stubbington, 2020). The European Council and Council of the EU are clearly concerned about the signals they convey to their publics, but they also care about cues they transmit to other audiences. Analyses of the latter's response to signals from Brussels would complement public opinion research.

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The responsive public: How EU decisions shape public
opinion on salient policies

*Online appendix of supporting information:
Not for publication*

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Table A.1: Wording of vignettes in Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee relocation experiments

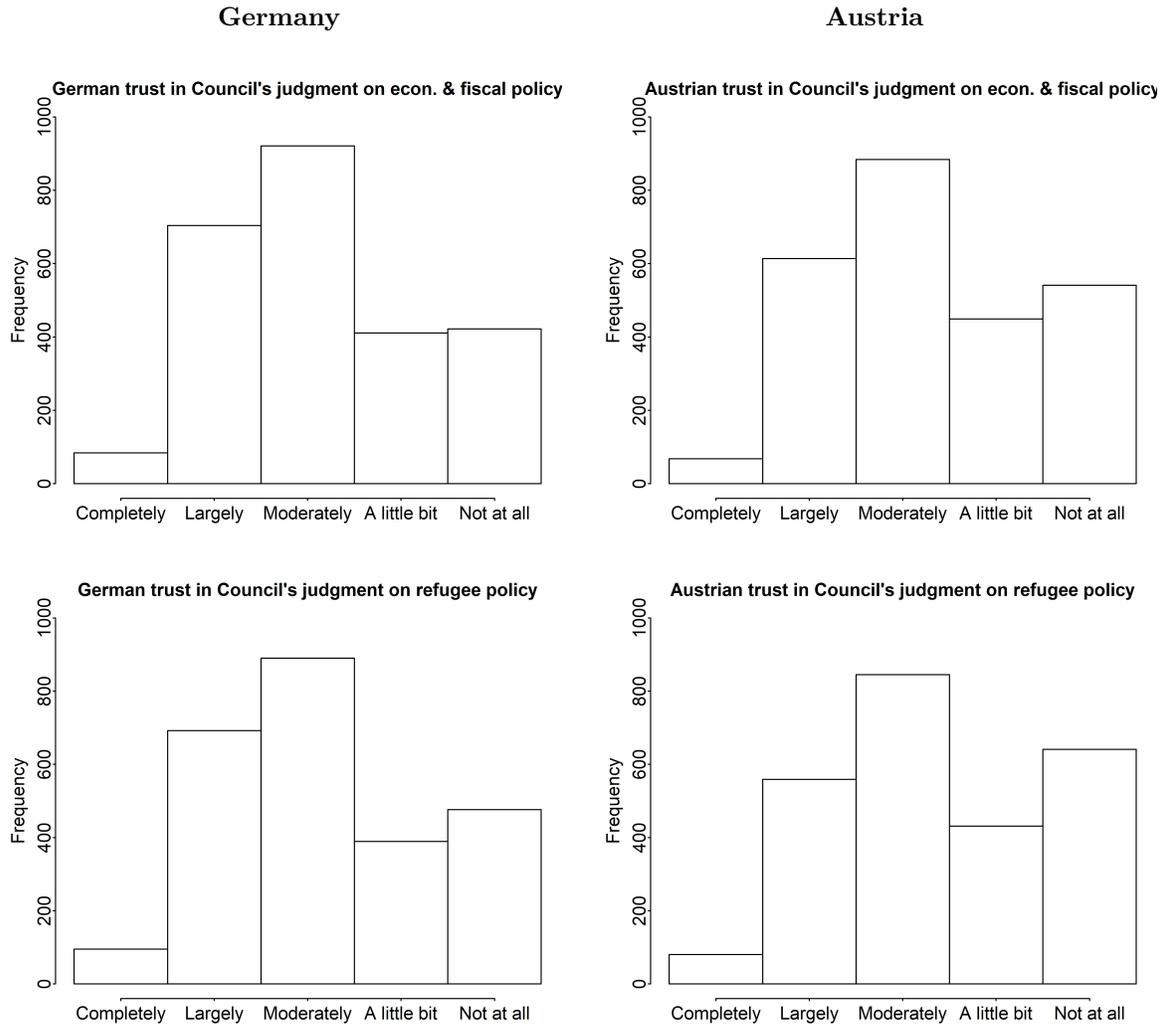
Treatment condition	Wording
<i>Coronavirus economic recovery aid experiment</i>	
Unanimous Council approval	In a unanimous vote, the Council of the European Union accepted this proposal.
Council approval with dissent	The Council of the European Union accepted this proposal, but four small members of the European Union voted against it, because they opposed giving grants to countries in crisis.
Council non-approval due to vetoes	The Council of the European Union did not accept the proposal, because four small members cast vetoes, because they are opposed to grants to countries in crisis.
Council non-approval due to broad opposition	The Council of the European Union did not accept this proposal, because most members of the European Union opposed giving grants to countries in crisis.
<i>Refugee relocation experiment</i>	
Unanimous Council approval	In a unanimous vote, the Council of the European Union accepted this proposal.
Council approval with dissent	The Council of the European Union accepted this proposal, but five small members of the European Union voted against it, because they do not want to relocate these refugees.
Council non-approval due to vetoes	The Council of the European Union did not accept the proposal, because France and Poland were opposed to relocating these refugees.
Council non-approval due to broad opposition	The Council of the European Union did not accept this proposal, because the majority of European countries were opposed to relocate these refugees.

Note: Note the subtle differences in the wording of the experimental treatments. If both experiments yield similar results even though the wording varies, I can be confident that the results do not hinge on the specific formulation of the experimental treatments.

Table A.2: Descriptive statistics: original surveys containing experiments

Variable	Austrian sample			German sample			Both samples	
	N	Mean	St.d.	N	Mean	St.d.	Min.	Max.
Dependent variables								
Support for economic recovery aid	2,043	0.499	0.331	2,037	0.586	0.311	0	1
Support for refugee relocation	2,039	0.509	0.388	2,033	0.564	0.369	0	1
Randomized treatments								
EU Council approval ('eco. aid exp.')	2,043	0.502	0.500	2,037	0.500	0.500	0	1
EU Council approval ('refugees exp.')	2,039	0.496	0.500	2,033	0.504	0.500	0	1
Unanimous Council approval ('eco. aid exp.')	2,043	0.247	0.431	2,037	0.250	0.433	0	1
Unanimous Council approval ('refugees exp.')	2,039	0.250	0.433	2,033	0.250	0.433	0	1
Council approval with dissent ('eco. aid exp.')	2,043	0.256	0.436	2,037	0.250	0.433	0	1
Council approval with dissent ('refugees exp.')	2,039	0.247	0.431	2,033	0.254	0.436	0	1
Council non-approval: vetoes ('eco. aid exp.')	2,043	0.244	0.430	2,037	0.251	0.434	0	1
Council non-approval: vetoes ('refugees exp.')	2,039	0.251	0.434	2,033	0.249	0.432	0	1
Csl non-app'l: Broad opposition ('eco. aid e.')	2,043	0.253	0.435	2,037	0.249	0.432	0	1
Csl non-app'l: Broad opposition ('refugees e.')	2,039	0.253	0.435	2,033	0.247	0.431	0	1
Domestic elite opinion cue ('eco. aid exp.')	2,043	0.499	0.500	2,037	0.498	0.500	0	1
Domestic elite opinion cue ('refugees exp.')	2,039	0.501	0.500	2,033	0.501	0.500	0	1
Pretreatment covariates								
Trust in Council's judgment ('eco. aid exp.')	2,043	2.293	1.140	2,037	2.149	1.106	1	5
Trust in Council's judgment ('refugees exp.')	2,039	2.385	1.167	2,033	2.161	1.130	1	5
Female	2,043	0.503	0.500	2,037	0.490	0.500	0	1
Age	2,042	43.02	14.55	2,036	49.47	17.23	18	90
Family income (in EUR 1,000k)	2,043	2.776	1.362	2,037	2.73	1.459	0.050	6.5
Educ. (high school diploma)	2,043	0.235	0.424	2,037	0.134	0.341	0	1
Educ. (vocational training)	2,043	0.362	0.481	2,037	0.305	0.460	0	1
Educ. (college degree)	2,043	0.078	0.269	2,037	0.109	0.312	0	1
Educ. (masters or doctorate)	2,043	0.174	0.379	2,037	0.199	0.400	0	1
Interested in politics	2,043	3.317	0.920	2,037	3.406	0.925	1	5
Interested in foreign affairs	2,043	3.468	0.785	2,037	3.498	0.798	1	5
Political left	2,035	3.134	0.966	2,034	3.195	0.884	1	5
Trad./auth./nationalist	2,043	13.23	3.422	2,034	13.59	3.187	5	25

Figure A.1: Respondents' trust in the judgment of the Council of the EU about refugee policy and economic and fiscal policy: Descriptive statistics of original surveys containing experiments



Note: The upper two histograms display the distribution of respondents' level of trust in the Council of the EU's judgment on issues of economic and fiscal policy. The upper left panel shows that 67% of German respondents reported at least a moderate amount of trust in the judgment of the Council of the EU in this policy area. The upper right histogram displays the corresponding data for Austria, where 61% of respondents place at least moderate trust in the Council's refugee policies. The mean values amount to 1.8 in Germany and 1.9 in Austria on a five-point scale from 'completely trust' [0] to 'do not trust at all' [4]. The lower two histograms depict the patterns of trust in the Council of the EU's judgment on refugee policy. They show that 66% of German respondents and 58% of Austrian respondents place at least moderate trust in the Council's policy choices. The means amount to 2.2 in Germany and 2.4 in Austria on a five-point scale from 'completely trust' [0] to 'do not trust at all' [4].

Table A.3: Descriptive statistics: subsample of 2020 Eurobarometer 93.1 survey

Variable	<i>N</i>	Mean	St.d.	Min.	Max.
Dependent variable					
Support for economic recovery aid	8,784	0.170	0.376	0	1
Exogenous treatment					
After Council approval	8,784	0.439	0.496	0	1
Pretreatment covariates					
Low trust in Council's judgment	8,672	1.320	0.709	0	3
Female	8,784	0.497	0.500	0	1
Age	8,784	53.97	17.33	15	95
Income category: lower (baseline)	8,784	0.293	0.455	0	1
Income category: middle class	8,784	0.543	0.498	0	1
Income category: upper	8,784	0.164	0.370	0	1
Educ. (middle school) (baseline)	8,784	0.108	0.311	0	1
Educ. (high school)	8,784	0.139	0.345	0	1
Educ. (vocational training)	8,784	0.211	0.408	0	1
Educ. (college)	8,784	0.232	0.422	0	1
Educ. (graduate school)	8,784	0.310	0.463	0	1
Interested in politics	8,784	2.250	0.635	1	3
Interested in European affairs	8,784	2.009	0.643	1	3
Political left	8,784	5.845	1.977	1	10
Political left sq.	8,784	38.070	23.259	1	100

Note: The subsample contains all respondents from countries that are net contributors to the EU budget (Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and Sweden). The dichotomous treatment variable takes the value 0 for respondents who were interviewed on or before the conclusion of the European Council summit on 21 July 2020 and takes the value 1 for those who took the survey at a later date. See the main text for further details.

Table A.4: Cues from Council of the EU and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from OLS models of 2020 survey data

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor recovery aid		Favor refugee relocation	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
EU Council approval	0.059 * ** (0.013)	0.062 * ** (0.013)	0.041 * ** (0.012)	0.035 * ** (0.010)
Female		-0.056 * ** (0.013)		-0.029 * ** (0.009)
Age		0.002 * ** (0.000)		0.002 * ** (0.000)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)		0.008 (0.005)		0.010 * * (0.004)
Educ. (high school diploma)		0.016 (0.027)		0.081 * ** (0.020)
Educ. (vocational training)		-0.023 (0.013)		0.003 (0.013)
Educ. (university)		-0.001 (0.019)		0.083 * ** (0.017)
Interested in politics		-0.012 (0.008)		-0.022 (0.013)
Interested in foreign affairs		0.061 * ** (0.009)		0.054 * ** (0.017)
Political left		0.062 * ** (0.009)		0.110 * ** (0.015)
Trad./auth./nationalist		-0.024 * ** (0.002)		-0.034 * ** (0.004)
Constant	0.536 * ** (0.006)	0.441 * ** (0.064)	0.554 * ** (0.006)	0.437 * ** (0.096)
Province f.e.	yes	yes	yes	yes
Observations	2,037	2,030	2,033	2,025
R-squared	0.019	0.195	0.013	0.279

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors clustered by province in parentheses. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table A.5: Cues from Council of the EU and Austrian public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from OLS models of 2020 survey data

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor recovery aid		Favor refugee relocation	
	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
EU Council approval	0.038 ** (0.013)	0.039 ** (0.012)	0.015 (0.016)	0.011 (0.013)
Female		-0.027 (0.018)		-0.012 (0.011)
Age		-0.001 (0.001)		-0.001 * * (0.000)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)		0.004 (0.005)		0.021 * ** (0.002)
Educ. (high school diploma)		0.010 (0.020)		0.109 * ** (0.016)
Educ. (vocational training)		0.001 (0.018)		0.013 (0.015)
Educ. (university)		-0.040 (0.024)		0.130 * ** (0.023)
Interested in politics		-0.001 (0.012)		0.011 (0.018)
Interested in foreign affairs		0.031 * * (0.011)		0.029 (0.016)
Political left		0.072 * ** (0.010)		0.141 * ** (0.010)
Trad./auth./nationalist		-0.027 * ** (0.002)		-0.034 * ** (0.003)
Constant	0.519 * ** (0.007)	0.589 * ** (0.082)	0.470 * ** (0.007)	0.326 * ** (0.063)
Province f.e.	yes	yes	yes	yes
Observations	2,043	2,034	2,039	2,031
R-squared	0.015	0.206	0.009	0.409

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors clustered by province in parentheses. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table A.6: Cues from Council of the EU and Austrian and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from pooled OLS models of 2020 survey data

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor recovery aid		Favor refugee relocation	
	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
EU Council approval	0.049 * ** (0.009)	0.051 * ** (0.009)	0.028 * * (0.011)	0.023 * * (0.009)
Female		-0.043 * ** (0.011)		-0.019 * * (0.007)
Age		0.001 (0.000)		0.000 (0.000)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)		0.007* (0.004)		0.017 * ** (0.003)
Educ. (high school diploma)		0.012 (0.015)		0.094 * ** (0.014)
Educ. (vocational training)		-0.010 (0.012)		0.003 (0.009)
Educ. (college)		-0.017 (0.014)		0.103 * ** (0.014)
Interested in politics		-0.007 (0.007)		-0.004 (0.011)
Interested in foreign affairs		0.045 * ** (0.009)		0.039 * ** (0.012)
Political left		0.068 * ** (0.006)		0.128 * ** (0.010)
Trad./auth./nationalist		-0.026 * ** (0.002)		-0.034 * ** (0.002)
Constant	0.541 * ** (0.004)	0.528 * ** (0.055)	0.560 * ** (0.005)	0.417 * ** (0.057)
Province f.e.	yes	yes	yes	yes
Observations	4,080	4,064	4,072	4,056
R-squared	0.034	0.209	0.016	0.342

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors clustered by province in parentheses. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table A.7: Cues from Council of the EU, trust in Council, and Austrian and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from OLS models of 2020 survey data

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor recovery aid		Favor refugee relocation	
	German sample (13)	Austrian sample (14)	German sample (15)	Austrian sample (16)
EU Council approval	-0.137 *** (0.032)	-0.137 *** (0.022)	-0.062* (0.033)	-0.070* (0.036)
Low trust in EU Council	-0.075 *** (0.006)	-0.101 *** (0.011)	-0.051 *** (0.011)	-0.059 *** (0.008)
Council approval * low trust	0.025 ** (0.010)	0.033 *** (0.007)	0.008 (0.010)	0.019* (0.010)
Female	-0.051 *** (0.009)	-0.021 (0.019)	-0.020 ** (0.008)	0.004 (0.012)
Age	0.002 *** (0.000)	0.001 (0.001)	0.002 *** (0.000)	-0.001 ** (0.000)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.004)	0.012 *** (0.002)
Educ. (high school diploma)	0.007 (0.025)	-0.003 (0.021)	0.051 *** (0.017)	0.087 *** (0.012)
Educ. (vocational training)	-0.015 (0.014)	0.009 (0.019)	-0.005 (0.013)	0.019 (0.013)
Educ. (university)	-0.003 (0.014)	-0.054 ** (0.020)	0.063 *** (0.012)	0.117 *** (0.021)
Interested in politics	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.003 (0.009)	-0.008 (0.013)	0.009 (0.016)
Interested in foreign affairs	0.035 *** (0.010)	0.018 (0.011)	0.025 (0.017)	0.016 (0.014)
Political left	0.044 *** (0.008)	0.043 *** (0.010)	0.085 *** (0.013)	0.106 *** (0.009)
Trad./auth./nationalist	-0.020 *** (0.002)	-0.023 *** (0.002)	-0.026 *** (0.002)	-0.030 *** (0.003)
Trust in German government	-0.057 *** (0.006)	-0.017 (0.010)	-0.095 *** (0.007)	-0.062 *** (0.008)
Constant	0.967 *** (0.073)	1.072 *** (0.096)	0.973 *** (0.082)	0.850 *** (0.055)
Province f.e.	yes	yes	yes	yes
R-squared	0.346	0.300	0.449	0.486
Observations	2,030	2,034	2,025	2,031

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors clustered by province in parentheses. *N* varies across models of the same national sample due to missing values.

Table A.8: Cues from Council of the EU, trust in Council, and Austrian and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from pooled OLS models of 2020 survey data

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Favor recovery aid	Favor refugee relocation
	Pooled sample (17)	Pooled sample (18)
EU Council approval	0.138 * ** (0.019)	0.072 * ** (0.025)
Low trust in EU Council	-0.090 * ** (0.008)	-0.059 * ** (0.007)
Council approval * low trust	0.029 * ** (0.006)	0.015* (0.008)
Female	-0.038 * ** (0.010)	-0.006 (0.008)
Age	0.001 * ** (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)	-0.003 (0.003)	0.005 (0.003)
Educ. (high school diploma)	0.001 (0.014)	0.066 * ** (0.011)
Educ. (vocational training)	-0.000 (0.013)	0.004 (0.008)
Educ. (university)	-0.023* (0.012)	0.086 * ** (0.012)
Interested in politics	-0.005 (0.006)	0.001 (0.010)
Interested in foreign affairs	0.027 * ** (0.008)	0.019 (0.011)
Political left	0.044 * ** (0.006)	0.096 * ** (0.008)
Trad./auth./nationalist	-0.022 * ** (0.002)	-0.028 * ** (0.002)
Trust in German government	-0.036 * ** (0.008)	-0.077 * ** (0.007)
Constant	0.894 * ** (0.057)	0.871 * ** (0.056)
Province f.e.	yes	yes
R-squared	0.325	0.462
Observations	4,064	4,056

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors clustered by province in parentheses. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table A.9: Cues from a united or divided Council of the EU and Austrian and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from OLS models of 2020 survey data

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor recovery aid		Favor refugee relocation	
	German sample (19)	Austrian sample (20)	German sample (21)	Austrian sample (22)
Council approval: dissent	−0.039 * *	−0.031	0.002	0.002
	(0.015)	(0.025)	(0.019)	(0.014)
Council non-approval: veto	−0.066 * **	−0.053 * **	−0.007	0.012
	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.011)	(0.015)
Council non-approval: opposition	−0.098 * **	−0.058 * *	−0.061 * **	−0.031
	(0.019)	(0.025)	(0.015)	(0.020)
Female	−0.055 * **	−0.027	−0.028 * **	−0.013
	(0.013)	(0.019)	(0.009)	(0.011)
Age	0.002 * **	−0.001	0.002 * **	−0.001 * *
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)	0.008	0.004	0.010 * *	0.021 * **
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.002)
Educ. (high school diploma)	0.016	0.010	0.082 * **	0.109 * **
	(0.027)	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.016)
Educ. (vocational training)	−0.024*	0.002	0.006	0.011
	(0.014)	(0.019)	(0.014)	(0.016)
Educ. (university)	−0.002	−0.039	0.085 * **	0.132 * **
	(0.019)	(0.024)	(0.018)	(0.024)
Interested in politics	−0.011	−0.001	−0.022*	0.011
	(0.008)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.017)
Interested in foreign affairs	0.060 * **	0.031 * *	0.055 * **	0.028
	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Political left	0.062 * **	0.072 * **	0.110 * **	0.141 * **
	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.014)	(0.010)
Trad./auth./nationalist	−0.024 * **	−0.027 * **	−0.034 * **	−0.034 * **
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Constant	0.527 * **	0.645 * **	0.474 * **	0.338 * **
	(0.069)	(0.084)	(0.095)	(0.069)
Province f.e.	yes	yes	yes	yes
R-squared	0.198	0.207	0.281	0.410
Observations	2,030	2,034	2,025	2,031

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors clustered by province in parentheses. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table A.10: Cues from a united or divided Council of the EU and Austrian and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from pooled OLS models of 2020 survey data

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Favor recovery aid	Favor refugee relocation
	Pooled sample (23)	Pooled sample (24)
Council approval: dissent	-0.035 ** (0.014)	-0.006 (0.047)
Council non-approval: veto	-0.059 *** (0.011)	-0.008 (0.038)
Council non-approval: opposition	-0.078 *** (0.015)	0.184 *** (0.056)
Female	-0.043 *** (0.011)	0.075 ** (0.028)
Age	0.001 (0.000)	-0.001 (0.002)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)	0.007* (0.004)	-0.065 *** (0.011)
Educ. (high school diploma)	0.012 (0.015)	-0.380 *** (0.056)
Educ. (vocational training)	-0.010 (0.012)	-0.015 (0.038)
Educ. (university)	-0.017 (0.014)	-0.420 *** (0.055)
Interested in politics	-0.006 (0.007)	0.017 (0.042)
Interested in foreign affairs	0.045 *** (0.008)	-0.156 *** (0.047)
Political left	0.068 *** (0.006)	-0.511 *** (0.038)
Trad./auth./nationalist	-0.026 *** (0.002)	0.138 *** (0.009)
Constant	0.598 *** (0.056)	3.235 *** (0.234)
Province f.e.	yes	yes
R-squared	0.211	0.344
Observations	4,064	4,056

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors clustered by province in parentheses. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table A.11: Cues from Council of the EU, domestic elite cues, and Austrian and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from OLS models of 2020 survey data

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor recovery aid		Favor refugee relocation	
	German sample (25)	Austrian sample (26)	German sample (27)	Austrian sample (28)
EU Council approval	0.063 * ** (0.013)	0.040 * * (0.013)	0.035 * ** (0.010)	0.010 (0.013)
Domestic elite signal	0.022 (0.016)	-0.053 * ** (0.007)	0.007 (0.012)	-0.028 * * (0.011)
Female	-0.056 * ** (0.013)	-0.025 (0.019)	-0.029 * ** (0.009)	-0.013 (0.011)
Age	0.002 * ** (0.000)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.002 * ** (0.000)	-0.001 * * (0.000)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)	0.008 (0.005)	0.005 (0.005)	0.010 * * (0.004)	0.021 * ** (0.002)
Educ. (high school diploma)	0.016 (0.027)	0.008 (0.020)	0.081 * ** (0.020)	0.110 * ** (0.016)
Educ. (vocational training)	-0.023 (0.013)	0.001 (0.018)	0.003 (0.013)	0.013 (0.015)
Educ. (university)	-0.001 (0.019)	-0.042 (0.023)	0.083 * ** (0.017)	0.129 * ** (0.023)
Interested in politics	-0.012 (0.008)	-0.000 (0.012)	-0.022 (0.013)	0.010 (0.017)
Interested in foreign affairs	0.060 * ** (0.009)	0.031 * * (0.011)	0.054 * ** (0.017)	0.029 (0.016)
Political left	0.062 * ** (0.009)	0.071 * ** (0.010)	0.110 * ** (0.015)	0.141 * ** (0.010)
Trad./auth./nationalist	-0.024 * ** (0.002)	-0.027 * ** (0.003)	-0.034 * ** (0.004)	-0.034 * ** (0.003)
Constant	0.429 * ** (0.068)	0.615 * ** (0.085)	0.432 * ** (0.098)	0.342 * ** (0.061)
Province f.e.	yes	yes	yes	yes
R-squared	0.196	0.213	0.279	0.410
Observations	2,030	2,034	2,025	2,031

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors clustered by province in parentheses. *N* varies across models of the same national sample due to missing values.

Table A.12: Cues from Council, trust in Council, and European public attitudes on economic policies: Results from OLS models of 2020 Eurobarometer survey data

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Favor recovery aid (29)	(30)
After Council approval	0.0159** (0.008)	0.057*** (0.014)
Low trust in EU Council		-0.010 (0.007)
After Council approval * low trust		-0.032*** (0.011)
Female	-0.013 (0.008)	-0.014* (0.008)
Age	-0.001*** (0.0002)	-0.001*** (0.0002)
Income category: middle class	0.007 (0.010)	0.004 (0.010)
Income category: upper	0.007 (0.013)	0.002 (0.013)
Educ. (high school)	0.004 (0.016)	-0.001 (0.017)
Educ. (vocational training)	0.011 (0.015)	0.008 (0.016)
Educ. (college)	-0.016 (0.015)	-0.004 (0.018)
Educ. (graduate school)	-0.017 (0.015)	-0.021 (0.015)
Interested in politics	0.006 (0.009)	0.008 (0.009)
Interested in European affairs	-0.013 (0.009)	-0.017* (0.009)
Political left	-0.008 (0.009)	-0.008 (0.010)
Political left sq.	0.002** (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)
R-squared	0.010	0.013
Observations	8,784	8,672

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors in parentheses. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table A.13: Covariate balance analyses and placebo test: Results from OLS models of 2020 Eurobarometer survey data

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Interview after 7/21 (31)	(32)	Free movement in EU (33)
After Council approval			-0.001 (0.006)
Female	0.000 (0.010)	0.003 (0.010)	-0.003 (0.006)
Age	-0.001** (0.0003)	-0.001** (0.0003)	-0.0002 (0.0002)
Income category: middle class	-0.022* (0.012)	-0.009 (0.012)	-0.017** (0.008)
Income category: upper	-0.031* (0.016)	-0.010 (0.017)	-0.032*** (0.010)
Educ. (high school)	0.022 (0.021)	-0.000 (0.021)	-0.007 (0.013)
Educ. (vocational training)	0.006 (0.019)	0.000 (0.019)	0.020 (0.013)
Educ. (college)	0.022 (0.020)	0.008 (0.020)	-0.005 (0.012)
Educ. (graduate school)	0.038* (0.020)	0.030 (0.020)	-0.010 (0.012)
Interested in politics	-0.006 (0.011)	-0.011 (0.011)	-0.018*** (0.007)
Interested in European affairs	-0.002 (0.011)	0.001 (0.011)	0.011* (0.007)
Political left	0.007 (0.012)	0.004 (0.012)	-0.024*** (0.008)
Political left sq.	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.001* (0.001)
Country f.e.	<i>yes</i>		
Region f.e.	<i>yes</i>		
R-squared	0.132	0.177	0.012
Observations	8,786	8,786	8,784

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors in parentheses. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table A.14: News coverage of European Council’s endorsement of Coronavirus economic recovery aid: content analysis of European television news on 21 July 2020

<i>Start time</i>	<i>TV station</i>	<i>News program</i>	<i>Program’s start time</i>	<i>Prominently featured coverage?</i>	<i>Top news story?</i>
Austria	ORF	Zeit im Bild 1	7:30 p.m.	Yes	2nd
Finland	Yle TV1	Yle Areena	7:30 p.m.	Yes	1st
France	France 2	Journal de 20 Heures	8 p.m.	Yes	1st
France	TF1	Journal de 20 Heures	8 p.m.	Yes	1st
Germany	ARD	Tagesschau	8 p.m.	Yes	1st
Germany	ZDF	Heute	7 p.m.	Yes	1st
Ireland	RTÉ	RTÉ News: Nine O’Clock	9 p.m.	Yes	6th
Italy	RAI	RAI TG1	5 p.m.	Yes	1st
Netherlands	NOS	NOS Journaal 2000	8 p.m.	Yes	2nd
Poland	TVN	Fakty	7 p.m.	Yes	1st
Portugal	RTP1	Telejornal	8 p.m.	Yes	1st
Spain	TVE	Telediario	9 p.m.	Yes	1st
Sweden	SVT2	Rapport	7:30 p.m.	Yes	2nd

Note: This table summarizes the results of a news media content analysis of a sample of top-rated television news programs. It shows that all analyzed news programs prominently covered the European Council’s endorsement of Coronavirus economic recovery aid on 21 July 2020. On that day, most of them made this decision their top news story, which is remarkable insofar as news pressure of competing stories (e.g., new government regulations to combat the spread of Covid-19 in Austria and the Netherlands) was high on that day.

All news programs in the sample are among the two highest-rated national television news programs in their country and air every night. Limited availability of video recordings and language barriers explain why the sample does not include television news from all EU member states.

News reports are coded as prominently featuring coverage of the Council’s decision if their program on 21 July 2020 included a long segment (of approximately three minutes or more) that summarized the Council’s endorsement of economic recovery aid and provided some commentary (e.g., an excerpt from a prime minister’s press conference held at the end of the European Council summit, other elite comments or an analysis by the news anchor or a news commentator).

The top (or lead) news story is the first one presented in the news program. The table indicates whether and how many other news stories preceded the report on the European Council’s decision.